USDA Foreign Agricultural Service
GAIN Report
Global Agriculture Information Network
Template Version 2.09

Voluntary Report - Public distribution

Date: 1/28/2008

GAIN Report Number: TH8014

Thailand

Biotechnology

Biotech Field Trials: Efforts to Clarify Cabinet Guidelines

2008

Approved by:
Gary Meyer, Agricultural Counselor
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:
Sakchai Preechajarn, Agricultural Specialist
Maysa Kunasirirat, Agricultural Assistant

Report Highlights:
On January 16, 2007, relevant Thai government agencies and some non-government organizations conducted a half-day workshop to clarify the Cabinet's recent agreement to revoke a ban on biotech field trials.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Trade Report
Bangkok [TH1]
[TH]

On December 25, 2007, the Thai Cabinet agreed in principle to revoke its 2001 ban on biotech field trials. See TH8003. Details of the agreement are as follows:

1) The Cabinet's Secretariat Office was ordered to accelerate the process of legislating a National Biosafety Decree to be effective as soon as possible.
2) While the National Biosafety Decree has not been placed, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC) is to prepare to extend the scope of agricultural biotechnology research to field trials. All field trials must be conducted in government properties. MOAC must:
    - Clearly define area and plant variety;
    - Develop measures of stringent control and surveillance;
    - Study and assess environment and public health impacts in the surrounding field trial area; and
    - Adopt a process of public hearings as regulated in Section 67 of the current Thai Constitution.
3) The research should be subject to sustainable process and stakeholder participation as a means to mutual agreement prior to proposing a request of field trial approval in a certain area to the Cabinet.

Immediately following the Cabinet announcement, several biotech academics and researchers expressed disappointment with the Cabinet's approval suggesting that the Cabinet requirements were too stringent. Most biotech scientists strongly believe that the absence of a workable system for field trials is leaving Thailand behind other developing countries in Asia, such as China, Philippines, and Vietnam.

In an effort to address this concern, the National Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in cooperation with Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC) conducted a half-day workshop titled "Proactive Actions in Preparing for Biotech Field Trials", on January 16, 2008. The objective of the workshop was to have open discussion among regulators and researchers about the December 25 Cabinet agreement, develop measures to meet requirements set forth by the Cabinet, and determine target plant(s) and area(s) for field trials.

Attendees agreed that it would take at least 2-3 years to get biosafety legislation implemented. When looking into the details in conditions (2) and (3), the group saw many hurdles. For example, Cabinet requirements that the research should be subject to sustainable process and be mutually agreed by all related stakeholders were judged to be too unclear. The requirement that the final determination of specific plant and area be approved by the Cabinet was viewed as unworkable. In addition, the requirement for public hearing without specifying the scope of participation was viewed as invitation for anti-biotech groups to delay process outcomes.

The group elaborated approaches to meet the Cabinet requirements. While the pursuit on legislating the National Biosafety Decree is considered an intermediate-term approach, the convention proposed the following actions to be carried out quickly:

1) Define plant type and field trial location

Papaya will be a target plant for field trial requests. Selected areas must belong to the government and be located near growing areas affected by ring spot virus. Public hearings will be conducted jointly with local people who reside in a particular field trial area. Actions will be coordinated with related organizations on environment and health. A plan will be submitted for the Cabinet approval as soon as possible.

2) Elaborate measures for biotech field trial

Measures should be standardized for all government entities conducting biotech field trials. The group proposed that all stakeholders from related agencies prepare the draft and proposed it to relevant government entities and private organizations for their review.

3) Temporary Biosafety Committee

In the absence of a National Biosafety Committee (NBC) and a National Biosafety Decree, the present biosafety committee will be proposed as a temporary committee which is responsible for monitoring field trial to comply with biosafety measures.

4) Transparency in Monitoring Field Trial

Since the Department of Agriculture (DOA) is in charge of conducting field trials and supervising the field trials to comply with biosafety measures, it should clearly delegate roles and responsibilities among its different agencies to assure transparency in monitoring.

End of Report.